

Survival Instincts

By Suzy Hopkins

My parents were continually arguing. This meant I was neglected. So, I learned how to make sandwiches and heat up canned soup. Tomato soup with grilled cheese was my favorite. Much of the time our kitchen was out of anything to make a sandwich so I ate canned fruit. The fresh fruit basket contained dried-up or rotted apples, oranges or pears. The fridge was full of slimy vegetables since my mother never made the salads for which she had purchased these ingredients. I was usually feeling hungry. I took charge of feeding the cat so I could eat bites of the canned food.

From an early age I became independent – making my own decisions about how to wear my hair or what clothes to wear. I did my own laundry and ironed my clothes because my mother never got around to doing these less than fun jobs.

When my little sisters were born, when I was nine and ten, I took care of them whenever I was home – making food for them and changing their diapers. My father was a millionaire but never provided any nourishing time for his daughters. The school complained that my sisters were dirty and hungry. Finally, my father hired a nanny. Promptly my sisters were cared for and we now had dinner every evening. The nanny made a dinner that my mother could just put in the oven.

As a kid my most prized possession was my fierce independence.

It still is.